

Popping the Question by Luddleston

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Summary:

The first time Matt proposed to him, it was out of the blue, no warning except a devilish grin and a, "hey, wanna get a free dessert?"

Matt realizes that public proposals get you a lot of attention and free food, Shiro realizes he's even more in love with Matt than he thought he was, Keith realizes his best friend is an idiot and should just ask Matt out, already.

Popping the Question

Author's Note:

On valentine's day, because I like humor more than love, I was watching a video compilation of people rejecting public proposals. I started to think that some of them were so ridiculous they must have been fake, and then I thought about what you could get if you faked a successful proposal....

and then I decided Matt Holt probably has the same cynical, unromantic mental processes as me, and, unlike me, a Shiro to try it on.

The first time Matt proposed to him, it was out of the blue, no warning except a devilish grin and a, "hey, wanna get a free dessert?"

Shiro had agreed, because he thought Matt was going to complain about his drink being wrong or the service being slow or something, but instead, Matt got up, pushed his chair in, and got down on one knee.

Matt had been Shiro's best friend ever since they were twelve years old in the same robotics club at their middle school, when both of them were hopelessly nerdy and unattractive, but didn't care about that because they had each other and robots. They made it through to high school together, grew out of their awkward phases together, came out to each other before anybody else. They went to the same college and roomed together, knew everything about each other, the bad and the good.

Well, almost everything.

Matt didn't know about Shiro's obnoxious, horrible, deeply romantic feelings for him. He also didn't know that he'd basically destroyed Shiro when he started his long, emotional speech about how they "fell in love," peppered with details from dates they hadn't gone on, and one romantic encounter that Shiro was pretty sure was stolen from *Love, Actually*. When he followed the whole thing up with a convincingly shaky, "so... will you

"marry me?" it startled the most embarrassing "yes" of Shiro's life out of his mouth.

Matt had jumped on him and hugged him, pretending to cry into his shoulder (he'd actually been laughing hysterically), and the whole charade landed them a free dessert and a glass of champagne each.

Shiro supposed this was exactly what karma would dump on him for agreeing to go on an, "it's Valentine's Day but we're both super single so let's just hang out and get a fancy dinner anyway because fuck societal conventions" friend date with the guy he was into. He thought he'd just have to handle the torture of watching the way low lighting turned Matt's eyes amber, but nope, he had to deal with Matt popping the question and then pretending to be his new fiance all night.

They got some whistles as they left the restaurant hand in hand. Yeah, Shiro *wished* he'd been going home to have super romantic, passionate sex—no, nope, he didn't wish that, nor did he think about it at *all*. Instead, he spent the night giving his backseat commentary on Matt's latest Fallout 4 run. Not exactly the Valentine's he'd been hoping for, but Matt didn't mind when Shiro stretched out on the couch and put his legs over Matt's lap, so that was about as good as it was gonna get.

"I can't believe that worked," Matt had said in a burst of laughter. "Oh my god, I've gotta try that again. Best grift ever."

"I mean. You can't do it at that restaurant again," was all Shiro could think to reply with, because he couldn't tell Matt *no, don't drag me into that again, I can't handle that.*

"Oh, Shiro. There're a billion restaurants in this city we can try that on." Shiro was having nightmares about the particular look on Matt's face when he said it, the one that read *this is happening again, Shirogane.*

That was the exact point at which he'd realized this whole "crush on your best friend" thing wasn't survivable.

Matt was gonna kill him.

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Matt didn't try to repeat the fake proposal thing for a while. He didn't get a chance to, because they didn't go to a lot of nice restaurants, and Shiro told Matt he would both kill him and never listen to one of his Star Wars theories again if he did it when they went out on his birthday. He told Matt this again, with his eyes, when Matt started wiggling his eyebrows like that in a Taco Bell. No. Matt dropped it both times and managed to act like a normal person instead.

Shiro started to relax, like this was just another of Matt's ridiculous ideas that would eventually pass him by and go forgotten.

And of course, that was the perfect time to strike.

They were out with a big group of friends, celebrating Allura getting that internship she'd been trying for, at a decently nice restaurant, of course, because Allura had chosen it. Candles on the table, fancy chandeliers and actual tablecloths, that kind of place.

They stuck out like only a group of college students in a nice restaurant mostly full of couples in their mid-thirties could, quickly getting too loud, reaching over each other, swapping plates to try someone else's order. Lance, at one point, got up and took a selfie of their whole group, flashing his phone a peace sign, as usual. Shiro ordered a glass of wine, because his twenty-first had been less than a month ago and it was still novel enough, Matt let Pidge try it, and Shiro scolded him like he was the only actual adult in the group.

When they'd all finished eating, Hunk mentioned something about dessert, and Lance got excited because the menu featured a triple-chocolate cheesecake, and Lance was into anything with chocolate and the promise of diabetes.

"You wanna split one?" he asked, leaning on the arm of Keith's chair.

Keith shook his head. "Too sweet, no."

"And way too expensive," Hunk said, scrutinizing the menu description. "I could make this for like, so much less. Actually, I wanna try it. Lance, gimme your phone. I'm taking a picture of this menu."

Lance was halfway through, "use your own phone, dude—" when Matt cut in.

"I can get you a free one. Yeah, Shiro?"

"No. We're not doing this again," Shiro said, especially because Matt had actually dressed up tonight, in a blazer and a pair of skinny jeans he'd apparently been hiding somewhere in his closet, his unruly hair pulled into a ponytail. He looked gorgeous, and Shiro was pretty sure he'd blush himself to death if Matt tried proposing to him now. At least last time, he'd just been in an old NASA T-shirt.

"Not doing what again?" Pidge asked, and oh, hey, Matt had kept quiet about last time. "Wait. Matt, no, don't do that." Oh. Matt had not kept quiet about last time.

"I'm doing it," Matt said, leaning in over the table to make it more conspiratorial. "Don't try to stop me, Pidge."

Lance narrowed his eyes and asked, "what are you guys talking about?" He got his answer about ten seconds later, when Matt got down on one knee. Again.

"Oh my god," Shiro said, pressing a hand over his face, while Matt launched into almost the exact same proposal speech he'd given last time. Except this time, their audience included a bunch of people who knew him and would absolutely tease him about it later. Also, he was pretty sure Lance was filming it.

Matt, apparently, got sappier if given more attention. This time, he barrelled straight into, "and the first time you told me you loved me, I knew it was gonna be forever," and Shiro's heart just about pounded out of his chest. He and Matt said they loved each other all the time, just a friendly, "I love you,

man," or whatever, but this time, it got him emotional enough he nearly cried for real.

He was so far in his own head about it, he almost forgot to answer when Matt got to the end of his speech. Everything was silent for a moment, until he quietly replied, "yes," and the entire restaurant burst into applause. He was pretty sure Lance was screaming, but Lance was usually screaming about something. Matt had to practically get in his lap to hug him, and Shiro could smell his cologne, and he wasn't sure which one was driving him crazy. Probably both.

"Kiss me," Matt said, in his ear.

Their standing ovation was still loud enough that nobody else heard Shiro respond with, "what?"

"Kiss me. For veracity, or whatever."

He swallowed, but his mouth was still dry. Shiro really didn't want their first kiss to be "for veracity, or whatever." But this was going to be the only one he'd get, and he'd stared at Matt's mouth too long to push away the selfish urge to kiss him just for the satisfaction of finally doing it.

He laid a hand on his cheek and kissed him, chaste, but long enough to be convincing. Not long enough to taste Matt's lips. He wasn't getting himself in that deep, he wasn't letting himself fall in love for real.

When he dragged himself back to the world of anything that wasn't Matt, the first thing he saw was Keith staring at him, looking so far beyond suspicious, it was like he'd read Shiro's mind and found out his subconscious was primarily mental images of Matt's smile.

Shiro hadn't considered what would be worse than somebody finding out it wasn't real. Turns out, it was somebody finding out that it was a little too real.

Once they finished dessert (gratis, thanks to Matt) and escaped the slew of people congratulating them at the restaurant, they retreated to Allura's

apartment, because it was the biggest, and she had good wine that hadn't come in a box.

"Oh my god, we're totally doing that proposal thing," Lance was telling Keith as he flopped onto the couch, nearly spilling his glass of wine, which was fuller than a wineglass was supposed to be.

Keith frowned at him from where he was leaning against the arm of the couch. "I will say no. Don't test me, I will absolutely reject you."

"You're the worst boyfriend," Lance said, leaning against his hip and snagging his hand to press kisses to the back of it.

Shiro cleared his throat before interrupting. "Keith. Can I talk to you for a second?" he asked, nodding in the direction of Allura's room.

"Uh, yeah," Keith said, patting Lance on the head as he followed Shiro, giving him that same suspicious look when he closed the door behind them. "What's this about, Shiro?"

Shiro sat on Allura's bed, but Keith stayed standing, back to the wall, hands shoved in the pockets of his jeans, watching Shiro like he was trying to read his mind again. He paused, took a deep breath, which didn't help that much. "I, um. I. Okay. I'm just going to say all of this at once, so just—don't stop me or anything."

Keith nodded, slow, looking increasingly concerned.

"Okay, so. So, I noticed, uh, that you noticed during that... that proposal *thing*, that I was..." he stopped, sighed, and made a useless gesture with his hands. "I know you could tell I'm into him, like, *really* into him, and I..." he paused, but Keith let him continue his tirade, "I guess I'm not asking you to not tell him, or anything, because you wouldn't do that, but. I dunno, I kind of feel... guilty, maybe. Kissing him like that, and—and—I just don't want you to think I'm using him or anything, I just. I know he doesn't feel the same way—Matt always says exactly what he thinks, I've had to listen about his crushes for years, and I... I just had to. Kiss him. Because that's the only way I ever will, and. God. You must think I'm such an asshole." He

put a hand over his face, rubbing the bridge of his nose, like it was going to alleviate the headache that was already building.

Keith waited, and when Shiro didn't say anything for enough time to cement the end of his rambling, he took his hands out of his pockets and crossed his arms. "Well, you didn't have to say all that."

"What?"

"I didn't notice shit, man," Keith said, "why did you think I noticed? I just thought this was another one of your weird best friend things, like how he, like, sneaks up behind you and grabs your chest to piss you off, or whatever."

Shiro frowned. "You looked so, so. Suspicious, I guess. Like you knew there was more to it."

"I always look like that," Keith said, "I'm a suspicious-looking person. Shiro. You gotta know I don't notice this kind of stuff."

It *had* taken him way too many pickup lines, cute notes, and lattes with foam hearts to realize Lance was trying to date him.

"Oh."

"But seriously, Matt? He's so..." Keith didn't elaborate. "Wait. How long?"

"Too long," Shiro said, crouching forward to put his head in his hands and muffle a groan of frustration. "Like, since freshman year long."

Keith scoffed, and Shiro was pretty sure he was rolling his eyes. "So, tell him."

"I told you I can't," he said, his voice sounding particularly stuffy with his hands over his face. He lifted his head and sucked in a breath. "Why would I tell him? That's literally asking for rejection. All it's gonna do is make things weird between us."

"Weird's not bad. Lance makes things weird all the time, and I'm still dating him," Keith said. "All I'm saying is, he's kind of playing with your emotions, or whatever. But he doesn't know. Because you don't say shit." Keith sat down next to him, and, after a couple false starts, put an arm around his shoulders.

"Thanks, Keith."

"Don't thank me. Seriously, don't. I'm so bad at this, Shiro."

He laughed, leaning into Keith's side, and then they lapsed into silence for a little while, Keith awkwardly patting Shiro on the shoulder. He may have been bad at it, but he was trying.

"Hey. I mean this: Matt's a good guy. He's not gonna quit being your friend because he finds out you're into him. And if he does, I'll fight him." Shiro could feel him tense, like he was already preparing himself to take somebody down for Shiro's honor. "I'd win. He's a scrawny nerd."

"Should I start teaching him self-defense?"

"Probably. Just in general, not because of me." Keith dropped his arm and scooted away from Shiro, looking at him and then nodding, like he'd determined Shiro was going to be okay without physical contact. Keith looked very relieved about it. "C'mon, man. Lance is probably doing something stupid, and I'm supposed to make sure Allura doesn't punch him."

Shiro chuckled as he stood. "Supposed to."

"Yeah, well, sometimes he deserves it."

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The third time Matt proposed to him, it wasn't even to get anything for free.

They were at a bar, one that wouldn't card Shiro and wouldn't notice Matt's fake ID, Shiro having been persuaded by Matt's, *oh, come on, I'll be twenty-one in a couple months*. He said it while flicking the card between his

fingers, his nails snapping the plastic. Shiro spent too long watching his hands before saying, "fine, well, if you get caught, I'm not going down with you. *Mine's* real."

At least this wasn't like the time Matt took him to a gay bar, like, a *real* gay bar with neon rainbow lights, a dancefloor the size of a lecture hall that was somehow still crowded, and so, so many drag queens. He'd had to order Matt's drinks for him because, in Matt's words, the bartenders only served you if you were a pretty boy. And apparently, Shiro was a pretty boy. He'd argue that Matt was pretty, too.

This one was a gay bar, too, but it seemed a little more chill, with a more even ratio of seating-slash-pool-table to dancefloor, and it wasn't full of people who all looked like Instagram models. Shiro sat at the bar, waiting on his drink, when a guy took the barstool next to his, leaning close enough that their shoulders brushed as he waved the bartender's attention.

"Sorry," the guy apologized for the unintentional physical contact. Shiro didn't think he needed to, because they were in a bar that was getting more crowded by the minute.

"It's fine," Shiro said, and the bartender dropped off his drink, just a beer he'd picked at random off the list behind the bar, because he'd already had one very pink mixed drink of Matt's creation. At this point, anything else would get him drunk way too fast. Matt, who had the alcohol tolerance of all his Italian ancestors combined, had been drinking Long Islands like they were just iced tea.

He was about to hop off the barstool and find his way over to where Matt was watching a pool game, but then the guy next to him leaned in and said, "hey, would you let me buy you your next drink?" He had a hand on Shiro's knee, now, like everything else hadn't been forward enough.

Shiro looked at him this time, actually looked at him, and he was... okay? Pretty cute, looked a good few years older than Shiro, thin mouth, deep-set eyes, short, unstyled brown hair. He wasn't thin, but he wasn't anything else, and he wasn't Matt, so Shiro was having trouble bringing himself to be interested.

Realizing he'd paused too long, he eventually got out an, "oh, no, that's fine. Thanks, though." He got off the barstool and started taking steps backward.

The guy clapped him on the shoulder, but it didn't feel appropriately friendly. "Anytime. See you on the dance floor?"

"Oh. Maybe, if my, um. If I get dragged out there." Shiro hid the rest of his discomfort in a swallow of his beer, then looked indicatively at Matt, who was waving him over by this point. "I gotta go."

When Shiro found him, Matt immediately swayed into his side, giggling, probably nearing the count of one too many drinks. "Who was the handsy dude?" he asked, looking over Shiro's shoulder in the direction of the bar.

"Dunno. He asked to buy me a drink, that's all," Shiro said, and Matt's eyes jumped between the guy at the bar and the beer Shiro was tipping to his mouth.

"Oh yeah?"

Shiro choked on his drink, coughed, and swallowed. "No. No, I bought this, I wasn't... he asked me after I already ordered, and plus, I wasn't, um, not really interested."

Matt hummed, draining the rest of his Long Island, fishing an ice cube out of the cup with his tongue, and erasing the last bits of Shiro's sanity. God, if he couldn't handle watching his best friend fidget with a mostly-finished drink, he was going to have some issues. Matt was a fidgety guy.

"We gotta find you a man, Shiro," he said. Joked, because Matt was never going to seriously try and set him up with somebody. Part of Shiro wished it was because Matt secretly wanted him, but he shoved that part down and reminded himself sternly that he'd specifically asked Matt never to set him up with a guy.

Lance had this dumb running joke about Shiro being way too hot to be single. Shiro didn't think it was that funny, mostly because he was single for reasons currently standing next to him. Also, he wasn't that hot.

It wasn't like he didn't try. He'd gone on a couple first dates, one second date, and he'd messed around with guys at parties and stuff, but nobody ever compared to Matt. He'd meet a guy, think he was cute, try and convince himself he'd be a good boyfriend, and then remember the time he and Matt were dead tired studying for finals and Matt fell asleep draped on top of him on the couch. He'd woken up with his heart pounding in his throat, so hard it rattled his tonsils, and his palms sweating even though the room was freezing. He could still remember the precise feeling of Matt stretching, pulling the tense planes of his body against Shiro's from shoulder to hip, and it still turned him on more than anything he'd done with another guy.

Matt was just... different. He'd become different somewhere in their relationship, when Shiro went from mildly attracted to him to blindingly, deafeningly into him, and he couldn't name the date or imagine himself ever not being into Matt.

He was mid-thought on how cute Matt was with his hair up when somebody elbowed him in the arm, a purposeful, friendly nudge.

"Hey," said the same guy who'd been flirting with him at the bar, "I realized I got my drink, but I didn't get your name."

Shiro hadn't exactly been trying to give it to him. "I'm Shiro," he said anyway, just to be polite, extending a hand.

"Adrian," he said, holding Shiro's hand way too long and turning a polite handshake into something that didn't feel like a polite handshake anymore.

Matt, who was either pretending to just now notice Adrian talking to Shiro, or who actually took that long to catch on, leaned in and put an arm around Shiro—not around his shoulders, like he usually would, but around his waist. "Hey, I'm Matt," he said, going for a handshake as well, "Shiro's boyfriend."

Shiro tensed, because he was definitely not Matt, Shiro's boyfriend. Unless Shiro had somehow asked him out in his sleep, Matt was lying through his teeth.

"Boyfriend?" Adrian asked.

"Well, no, not actually," Shiro said, because he couldn't understand why Matt was *lying*, this wasn't a big deal, it wasn't like the guy was being creepy or anything, just flirting. Sure, he was a little more hands-on than Shiro liked, but Matt didn't need to step in.

"Yeah, actually, I'm his fiance," Matt said, leaning against him and smiling up at Shiro.

"No you're not," Shiro said, and dragged himself to the realization that he might've been a little drunk. Normal Shiro couldn't lie—Drunk Shiro couldn't even go along with somebody else's lie. So, when he continued to call Matt out, he started to wonder if maybe he hadn't been pacing himself as well as he thought he was.

Matt circled around to face him, his index finger jabbing him in the chest. "Well, I fucking would be, if you'd just say yes!"

Shiro blinked, trying to make his head stop spinning, because it was taking effort to figure out what soap-opera B.S. Matt was on. "I... Matt, c'mon." *Let's just go* was how that one was supposed to end, but Matt took it as invitation to layer on even more drama.

"Come on? Come on? We've been together for *years*, Shiro, I don't know why you're so *afraid* to just—"'

God, Shiro didn't know why he was, either. He took a step closer to Matt, about to give up and tell him everything, to spill it all in front of Adrian, who was backing away from them slowly, and the rest of the bar, which was coming to attention and watching the two of them.

"Marry me," Matt said, and Shiro faltered, stunned until he remembered Matt did this as a game, to get attention or free drinks, or whatever.

Everything inside him constricted with want, with the desire to say yes and mean it. But Matt was just drunk and trying (way too hard, probably) to save Shiro from a guy who was hitting on him. Matt was just drunk, and

giving Shiro the only excuse he'd ever have in his life to say, "yes. I will," then step forward, and bend Matt into an open-mouthed kiss.

He heard cheering, and somebody wolf-whistling, but they were distant things, second to the sound of Matt's little gasp before he kissed Shiro back with fervor. Matt's hands were on his chest, warm through his T-shirt, and Shiro rested his on Matt's waist, squeezing tighter when Matt's teeth scraped his lower lip.

Shiro's only explanation for the whole thing was that he'd ended up in the middle of a bar fight and died. Matt's mouth was somehow both heaven and sin, and Shiro thought he was maybe too tipsy to be making metaphors like that. Besides, he had better things to do, like wrap his arms around Matt and kiss him until reality kicked back in.

Reality didn't start working again until the next morning.

Shiro hadn't gotten drunk enough that he blacked out. He sort of wished he had, but he hadn't even been that drunk when he was kissing Matt, not enough to use the "I was completely wasted" excuse. He'd been sober enough that he could've stopped himself, but he'd pulled Matt in again and again, until they stumbled out into the chilly night air, arms still around each other.

Thank god Shiro didn't kiss him then, when nobody was watching. This was easier. It was just a game, an act, and he didn't have to be responsible for a sloppy, drunk, friendship-ruining makeout session. Just a regular sloppy, drunk makeout session.

He wanted to imagine he could still feel an impression Matt's lips had left on his, a taste, anything. He was also glad he couldn't. It would be harder to ignore, that way.

Getting out of bed, he clenched his eyes against what was either his usual migraine after staying out too late, or a hangover. Once he couldn't feel his own skull throbbing, he left his bedroom in search of some Advil and some coffee. A toothbrush would be nice, too.

He wasn't expecting Matt to be laying on the couch.

"You awake?" he asked, his voice quiet and scratchy. Matt was laying with his face buried straight in a pillow, and if he didn't respond, Shiro was gonna roll him over so he didn't suffocate himself.

Matt groaned and gave Shiro a thumbs-down.

"That bad, huh?"

"Stop," Matt said, "your voice hurts. Fuck. Talking hurts, too."

After a brief, mostly-silent detour to the kitchen (he'd shut the cabinet too loudly and got another mangled curse from Matt), he sat on the floor with his back to the couch, bumping Matt's hand with his.

"Hey. I brought you drugs."

Matt dragged his head out of the pillow and squinted at him. That wasn't the hangover, he was just missing his glasses. "What?"

Shiro turned his hand over and dropped a couple Advil into his palm, setting the glass of water on the floor next to him, because he wasn't sure Matt could be trusted not to drop it. "Drink all of that after," he said, following his own instructions.

"That's not drugs," Matt said. "Shit. I thought you were talking about like, weed, or something."

"Where would I even...?"

Matt sat up, effortfully, and swallowed the pills and half the glass of water in one. His voice sounded a little less ragged afterward. "Motherfucker. Don't let me drink that much again, Shiro."

"I told you to stop, you said you were Italian and you were fine," Shiro said, relocating to the couch now that Matt wasn't stretched across it.

"I'm a liar. You know this. I lied like, all night. I think I told thirty different people we were engaged." Matt continued to sip at his water, staring off into the middle distance like he was looking at something to the left of their TV. Shiro knew it looked like a giant blur to him, though.

"More than thirty," he said, nudging Matt's foot with his. "You proposed to me in front of the whole bar."

Matt shrugged. "I just really, really wanted to tell everyone I was engaged to the hottest guy in the bar. Also, that dude hitting on you was kinda creepy."

"You couldn't just tell him to back off?"

"Dude, have you met Drunk Matt? He is the world's most dramatic human being. I wanted to cause a scene," Matt said, setting the glass on the side table. He propped his face up on his hand and yawned. "Think I did an okay job."

"Yeah, you definitely caused a scene," Shiro said.

Matt groaned and rubbed his eyes, and the sunlight coming through the blinds was just starting to angle itself right to catch on Matt's mussed-up hair, lighting it up gold. Even hungover, he looked cute, and Shiro was reminded of exactly how screwed he was. "Yeah. About that," he said. "I'm sorry. I was all over you, dude. I was way worse than the creepy guy."

He was absolutely not. "It's okay," Shiro said, "I was... I mean, I was kind of all over you, too." He looked in the direction of the kitchen to avoid checking Matt's bottom lip for bite marks he may or may not have left there last night.

"Yeah, but..." Matt blew out a sigh that ruffled his hair. "I still should've had some... I dunno. Self-control."

Self-control. Shiro had been ignoring that particular virtue, too, and his conscience was smacking him upside the head for it today. No, that was just the hangover. His conscience was what made his chest hurt, made him feel

like Matt shouldn't have been the one apologizing, because everything Shiro had done had taken advantage of him.

"I was the one who went too far," he eventually said, his voice coming out thick and strangled like it did when he was about to cry. "You were way more drunk than me, I could've—I should have backed off."

Matt shifted to lean against Shiro's side, his arm around Shiro's shoulders, the most moving he'd done all morning, and he made a pained little huff like he regretted that much sudden motion. He pulled Shiro until his head was resting in the crook of Matt's shoulder, close enough that he could smell exactly how much Matt needed a shower. It was kind of gross, but Shiro was just as bad. Plus, Matt holding him was calming in its familiarity.

"Hey," Matt said, starting to trace nonsense patterns on Shiro's bicep. He did that all the time, idly, while they were watching movies, sometimes on his back or his knee. Sometimes they were abstract, other times, when Matt was cramming for an exam, they were chemical structures. "We were both drunk, we both did stuff we shouldn't have, and we both have... regrets." His hand stopped moving. "Actually? You know what? No. I don't regret it."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," Matt said, and Shiro could feel his determined nod against the top of his head. "Now I get to brag that I've kissed you."

"Oh, go to hell." Shiro shoved his shoulder into Matt's ribs, not with much force, because he couldn't do anything with much force right then, and Matt just laughed and shoved him back.

They got into an embarrassingly futile wrestling match, until they shoved each other to opposite sides of the couch, Matt's heel still digging into Shiro's calf. "Hey," he said, again. "You're my best friend and I love you. I don't want you to freak out about this and worry that anything changed."

"Okay," Shiro said, but something had.

Now, there was no part of him that could deny how hard he was falling for his best friend.

"I dare you," Lance said, stretched out on the couch in Matt and Shiro's living room, apropos of nothing, "to do that fake proposal thing, but make it so extreme that they give you your whole meal and everything for free."

Matt looked up from his laptop, considering, and Shiro tried to bury himself deeper into his chair. He couldn't be actually thinking about it. No way, not after last time.

"And how do you suggest I do that?"

"I dunno, man, dramatic speech?" Lance tried to gesture with his hands even though he was laying on top of his arm. "Sob story? Ooh. That would work. Dare you to cry. Dare you to make *Shiro* cry."

Shiro tipped his head over the back of the chair until he was staring at the ceiling and groaned. "No. No way, if you make me cry in public, I'll—"

"Kill me and never listen to one of my Star Wars theories again, I know," Matt interrupted. "Just, just calm down. Lance. What do I get if I win?"

"Free dinner and bragging rights, man, I don't have anything to sweeten the pot."

Matt hummed, steepling his fingers in front of his face like this was an incredibly important decision. "Naw," he said, after a moment, "I'll just not do it and tell you I did. For the bragging rights. Now go to class."

Lance stood and scooped up his backpack, flipping Matt off with his other hand. "Whatever, I'd just ask Shiro, he'd tell me the truth."

Matt stared Shiro down, and just received a shrug in return, because Lance was absolutely right. Once Lance was out the door, Matt relaxed, turning sideways and throwing his legs over the side of the chair, replacing his laptop on his stomach.

"I bet I totally could," Matt said. "Get free dinner, I mean."

"Knowing you, yeah," Shiro said, resting his cheek on his hand, because the less Matt could see of his unavoidable blush, the better.

"I won't spring that on you if you don't want me to, though." Matt went back to homework, either missing or ignoring Shiro's reaction. "I can just get somebody else in on it, I bet Lance would—"

"No." Shiro cleared his throat, and said, more casually, "no. I'll do it, I just... one last ride, right?"

"Always knew you were a rebel," Matt said, with the kind of grin that made Shiro forget to regret agreeing to it. He didn't want Matt getting down on one knee for anybody else. It was ridiculous to be possessive over something he didn't even have, and he hated himself for a little while afterward.

Matt took him out to dinner about a week or so later, and even if he hadn't been doing whatever that was with his eyebrows, Shiro would've known what he was planning. Matt tucked his arm into the crook of Shiro's elbow as they walked in the restaurant, patting the black leather of his jacket, giving him a smile that he probably thought was reassuring. Shiro didn't think anything was reassuring when you knew you'd fucked up as supremely as he was pretty sure he had.

Shiro hadn't been to the restaurant before—it was a cozy little place, with a real wood-burning fireplace, low lighting, mismatched vases of fresh-cut flowers on each of the tables. They were seated at this tiny table for two, knees bumping under, and Shiro, who couldn't quite stop thinking about the devious glint in Matt's eyes, and how much he loved it despite himself, forgot to look at the menu and just ended up ordering exactly what Matt did.

"Nervous?" Matt asked him halfway through dinner, probably because Shiro was picking at his food and absently tapping his fingers on the tabletop.

"I've never exactly known about it beforehand," Shiro said, "when you do this kind of thing. It's weird." He thought he'd feel better with time to mentally prepare himself, but instead he was going out of his mind with the knowledge that Matt was going to give him some impassioned talk about how much he loved him, and then he'd...

"Do you want me to kiss you after?" Matt asked him. Shiro knew Matt couldn't read his mind, or they wouldn't be in this situation, but it still felt that way.

He couldn't quite meet Matt's eyes as he nodded. "I mean, it's not like we've never... I'm just saying, uh, what's one more, right?"

What's one more. Everything, Shiro thought.

"Cool," Matt said, nodding to himself, "cool."

After they finished eating, nervousness started stamping its way through Shiro's stomach harder than before. Part of him wanted to call the whole thing off. Part of him wanted to run straight out the door with no explanation. Part of him wanted to take Matt's hand and ask him not to propose to him again unless he was doing it for real.

Inevitably, Matt stood, giving Shiro a reassuring smile, and dropped gracefully to a knee. Shiro turned to face him and leaned in like a magnet was pulling him, letting Matt take his hands.

"Takashi," he started, Shiro's full name soft on his lips and like an arrow through the heart when it left them.

"Matt?" He could pretend like he was surprised, because he was. Matt never called him that in any kind of seriousness.

There was a whisper through the restaurant of the *oh my god that guy's proposing* sort, and their waiter approached the table but stopped short of asking them if they were doing alright.

"So, there's something I've got to ask you," Matt said, laughing with convincing nervousness, his voice getting loud enough that it was a performance, not a display of affection. "I was thinking, the other day, about the first time I met you, when we were eleven and in the same science class in middle school, and both of us were the nerdy kids nobody liked, but you started talking to me about Star Wars and I knew right away I'd met my best friend."

"Yeah," Shiro said, smiling despite himself, because he remembered as well as Matt did.

Matt had once told him that a lie was more believable if you used real details. That was part of what made Matt such a good liar, good enough that even Shiro wanted to believe him.

"And then," he paused, shaky, and Shiro reminded himself to tell Matt that if biochemical research didn't work out for him, he'd have a career in acting. "It started turning into more. I've never... I've never said this before, but I think I fell in love with you that first night you told me you thought you might like boys, and you wanted to know how I told my parents."

Shit, Lance had egged Matt on too hard, he really was gonna make Shiro cry. He nodded, swallowing around the lump in his throat, willing it to go away and failing.

"I know it's kind of cheesy, marrying your high school sweetheart, and all, but... it's also us. I can't imagine life without you, beautiful. We've been through it all together, and—and we'll be through all the rest of it together, too, yeah?"

Shiro stole one hand from Matt's grip to press it to his face, genuine tears gathering at the corners of his eyes, because romantic or otherwise, he wanted that.

"So, um. I'm pretty sure you know what I'm gonna ask now," he said. Another nervous laugh. "But I want to say it anyways. Takashi, will you... will you be my husband?"

He'd never said it that way before. Shiro imagined him planning it in his head, determining what phrasing would cause maximum emotional impact, but he also hoped it was dark enough to hide his face in here, because he was actually crying, now.

"Yes," he said, so quiet Matt couldn't even hear him, but he nodded, still covering his face with one hand.

"Yeah?" Matt stood from his crouch, tugging Shiro up to stand with him.

"Yeah. Yes. Yes," he said, pulling Matt into his arms, hugging him while everybody applauded.

Matt just kissed him once, close-mouthed and soft, like their first but more comfortable. He'd gotten used to the way Matt kissed after one night of constant exposure, and he knew the right angle to keep from pressing Matt's glasses into his cheek, the right distance to lean in to meet him. Matt was back in his arms right after, up on his tiptoes to push him closer to Shiro's height.

"I meant that part about wanting to go through it all together, you know," he said into Shiro's ear, and nobody else in the place knew why Shiro held him tighter, then. "You mean so much to me, Takashi. Thanks for always putting up with my bullshit, man. I... I love you. Really."

"Yeah. Me too," Shiro said. "Love you, buddy."

If that had been the last time his heart fluttered over Matt, it would have been a perfect conclusion, but it almost came out as *love you, baby* instead, which was exponentially better and exponentially worse. If Shiro could have willed his stupid crush to be over, he would've picked that moment, but he couldn't force himself to stop feeling. He was starting to think he never would.

Oh, and they got their dinner for free.

Shiro's research paper was slowly killing him, and it had finally stopped raining, so Matt dragged him out of the apartment, claiming he needed fresh air. Shiro thought he needed coffee more, but the springtime weather was nice, too. The sky was cloudy, but the birds were singing, and the trees were starting to grow leaves again.

Begrudgingly, Shiro agreed this may actually have been good for him, the tension in his shoulders easing steadily. There was a park near their apartment, where Shiro normally went running in the mornings, but he'd been neglecting that habit of his recently, because it kept raining, and because of the research paper, and his imminent death, and whatnot.

"Is that my hoodie?" Shiro asked, tugging at the sleeve of Matt's shirt.

"Oh. Uh, yeah, pretty sure it is," he said, pulling on the collar. "Sorry, dude, kinda stole it."

"I don't mind," Shiro said. It was pretty cute, anyway, dwarfing Matt even though he wasn't that much shorter than Shiro. When he borrowed Shiro's clothes, though, it made obvious how much smaller Matt's shoulders were, how much thinner he was.

Matt nodded, then glanced down the path to their left, grabbing Shiro's elbow, and pulling him down it. "This way," he said, leading him in the direction of the lake—well, it was more of a pond.

With the way the weather had been, the dirt road was more mud than path, and Shiro concentrated on dodging puddles, taking a long time to realize Matt was still clinging to his arm.

The deck overlooking the lake was empty, probably because the road there was too much of a hassle. Shiro's shoes and socks were soaked through, and so were Matt's, but when Matt leaned over the railing with a breathless smile, staring out at the glassy surface of the water, Shiro started finding it hard to care.

"Okay, I give up. You were right," Shiro said, leaning on the railing next to him. The wood was a little wet still, and it was cold through the sleeves of

his shirt.

"I mean, I'm usually right," Matt replied. "What was it this time?"

"I needed to get out." Shiro watched a couple of last year's worn-brown fall leaves drifting across the lake's surface. "Thanks for dragging me away from my homework."

"Anytime," Matt said, nudging his shoulder against Shiro's. "But, uh, I didn't just bring you out to get you to stop drowning yourself in that stupid essay."

"Yeah?"

Matt nodded, looking determinedly at the lake instead of at Shiro. "I, um, I wanted to ask you something."

"You can ask me anything," Shiro said, honestly, still unsure why Matt had to take him to a lake to ask him a question. He could've just pulled Shiro's headphones off and asked it, like he normally did.

Matt turned to face him, braced himself on the railing for a second, then grabbed one of Shiro's hands in both of his. "You have to promise not to laugh at me," he said, and Shiro thought Matt maybe shouldn't go asking other people to make promises he wouldn't be able to make himself. He nodded, anyway, no less confused.

Matt dropped to a knee. Shiro said, "Matt, what—?"

"Shh. Just, let me—okay." Matt took a deep breath and let it out. Shiro glanced around, and no, they didn't have an audience that would warrant this. "I know I've done this like four times, now, but I... never meant it. Obviously."

Shiro laughed and echoed, "obviously." His heart was starting to race, and his palm was sweating on Matt's hands.

"Okay, but last time, I started saying real stuff about our friendship and I... I started to mean it." He squeezed Shiro's hand. "And maybe I didn't fall in

love with you in high school, but... I think I could now."

Shiro swore his heart stopped. His blood froze in his veins and he didn't breathe for what felt like hours, but was probably seconds.

"So my question is, uh, will you go out with me?"

Shiro stayed frozen for a second more, then pulled Matt to his feet. All the while, Matt was grumbling, "ugh, that was supposed to sound cool, that didn't sound cool at all. 'Will you go out with me,' what am I, twelve?" Shiro wasted no time in pulling him into a hug, burying his face in Matt's shoulder.

"I never thought you'd ask," he said. "I didn't think... I didn't think you felt the same way."

Matt planted his hands on Shiro's chest, pushing some space between them.
"Wait. You mean, you? Me? What?"

"Yeah," Shiro laughed, "for a long time, Matt."

"Oh my god, we're so dumb. Come here. Kiss me, come on, we should've been doing this months ago, fuck." Matt pulled him in, kissed him hard enough to push Shiro's back into the railing, his hands laced around Shiro's neck, entire body melting against his.

It was different from kissing him for show, no cheering or applause filling his ears, just the sound of Matt's lips meeting his, over and over. Shiro hugged him close, slipping his palms under Matt's hoodie (*his hoodie*) to feel the warmth of him through his T-shirt. He was comfortable with Matt like this, not waiting for a punchline or for Matt to start treating him like just a friend again. When they parted, Matt was smiling up at him, and he hopped up onto his tiptoes to peck Shiro on the lips again.

"You've been actually driving me out of my mind with the fake proposals, by the way," Shiro said. "It's a good thing I like you." He still had one arm around Matt's waist, reaching up to adjust his glasses with his other hand.

Matt rested his head on Shiro's shoulder, settling against him like he didn't plan on moving anytime soon. "Yeah, well, I promise I won't do that one again."

— — —

True to his word, Matt never proposed to him again.

— — —

Three years and some change later, though, Shiro was the one getting down on one knee.

Author's Note:

For just way too much more shatt, visit me on tumblr @luddlestons :)